NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND
DECISION RECORD
RAILROAD PASS FIRE, Z512
BLM/EK/PL2000/045

Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Supplement Environmental Assessment BLM/EK/PL2000/045, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Decision:

It is my decision to implement the Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan (NFRP) Supplement as described in the Environmental Assessment for the Railroad Pass Fire BLM/PL2000/045. Over 827 acres of public rangeland managed by the Bureau of Land Management Elko and Ely Field Offices were burned during this fire. Approximately 827 acres of the burned public land will be rehabilitated by planting of multiple species seed mixtures. Approximately 1 mile of new fence will be constructed in order to establish grazing closures to rest rehabilitated areas. Post-fire grazing management, including the period of time needed for closure, will be determined based on monitoring and achievement of site specific resource objectives. The Elko Field Office Manager has been delegated NFRP decision-making authority for the area burned within the BLM Ely District.

Rationale:

Implementation of the proposed action described in the NFRP Supplement EA for the Railroad Pass Fire will protect soils in the burned area, including preventing potential loss of soil due to wind and water erosion; will reduce potential invasion and establishment of noxious weeds and cheatgrass; will provide quality forage for livestock and wildlife; and will facilitate meeting established standards and guidelines for livestock grazing.

The Elko Resource Management Plan is silent for the proposed action. The proposed action is consistent with the objectives of the RMP and is consistent with federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and plans to the maximum extent possible

Monitoring:

Post-treatment monitoring studies will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed treatments and to determine the time frame for reopening lands for grazing.

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Helen Hankins Date
Elko Field Office

NORMAL FIRE REHABILITATION PLAN SUPPLEMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
RAILROAD PASS FIRE (Z512)
BLM/EK/PL-2000-045

Introduction:

This Supplement Environmental Assessment (EA) tiers to the Elko Field Office FY 2000 Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plan Environmental Assessment (NRFPEA) BLM/EK/PL2000/037. The Proposed Action includes NFRPEA Treatment # 1 (Construction and/or repair of fence to facilitate grazing closure), 2 (Planting of multiple species seed mixtures), and 9 (Herbicide site preparation treatment). The format of this Supplement EA follows the outline in the Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Handbook, BLM Manual Handbook H-1742-1 dated 7/27/99.

List of Preparers:

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Project Area Description:

A. Fire Description:

The fire was started by a lightning strike and was reported on June 26, 2000 and was declared controlled on June 27, 2000. It burned 827 acres of public land and no private land. Approximately 122 acres of this total occurred on the BLM Ely District. Two grazing allotments were affected: the Browne and Red Rock Allotments of which the fire impacted less than 3% and 1% of the total allotments, respectively. No structures were burned and no new dozer lines were constructed.

B. Vegetation and Soil Description:

The burned area ranges in elevation from 5501 ft to 6500 ft. The fire burned in a predominantly sagebrush/cheatgrass community. There are no perenniel drainages in the Basin Fire. Soils are moderately deep to deep with slow to rapid runoff. Both water and wind erosion hazard under preburn conditions are considered slight.

Proposed Project Treatments:

A. Revegetation:

1. Wildlife aerial seedings:

Approximately 827 acres will be seeded with Secar Snake River wheatgrass, Great basin wildrye, Basin big sagebrush, Western yarrow, forage kochia, and rice hulls (used as a seed dispersal mechanism). Seed would be aerially applied between late October through December the year following OUST herbicide treatment (see discussion under site preparation below). If possible, seed would be broadcast on snow to aid in germination and reduce seed consumption by rodents and birds. The purpose of the seeding is to provide forage for livestock and wildlife, particularly critical winter range forage for mule deer, and to reduce the potential for the invasion of invasive, nonnative weed species.

B. Structures:

1. Fencing:

Approximately 1 mile of existing allotment boundary fence will be repaired to allow closure of seeded areas to grazing for a period to be determined by post-rehabilitation monitoring. The fences are needed to protect the proposed seeding treatments and to allow for vegetation to become reestablished.

C. Erosion Control Treatments: None

D. Site Preparation:

1. OUST treatment:

Approximately 827 acres would be aerially sprayed with the herbicide OUST (sulfometuron methyl). This herbicide is approved for rangeland aerial spraying in Nevada by the Nevada Department of Agriculture and is also approved for rangeland use in Nevada by BLM. The purpose of the spraying is to kill viable cheatgrass in the burned area before aerial seeding to reduce the chance that cheatgrass will germinate in the area after rehabilitation seeding efforts.

Consideration of Critical Elements and Resources:

The following critical elements of the human environment are not present or are not affected by the proposed action or alternative:

ACECs
Environmental Justice
Farmlands, prime or unique
Floodplains
Wastes, hazardous/solid
Water Quality, surface/ground
Wetlands/Riparian Zones
Wild Horses and Burros
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

Critical elements and resources brought forward for analysis:

A. Air Quality:

The burned area is highly susceptible to wind erosion until revegetation occurs. Wind erosion can increase Particulate Matter #10 (PM#10) emissions causing exceedence of PM #10 air quality standards which can negatively affect human health. In addition, airborne dust can cause visibility and safety problems on roads in the area. The proposed vegetation and site prep treatments will encourage regrowth of vegetation, thus reducing future potential air quality impacts.

B. Cultural Resources:

The Railroad Pass Fire occurred within an area known to archaeologists as the Central Great Basin which has been inhabited by humans for approximately 12,000 years. Archaeological sites and cultural properties in this area must be afforded protection whenever possible. Section 106 of the Natural Historic Preservation Act mandates that the federal government will account for cultural resources in its projects and undertakings, including fire rehabilitation efforts. Ground disturbing activities such as discing, drilling, dozer line rehabilitation, fence construction, and road repair could damage cultural sites. Therefore, areas designated for mechanized seeding and other ground disturbance will be inventoried for cultural resources before the disturbance occurs in accordance with the State Protocol Agreement Between BLM, Nevada and the Nevada State Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO). At a minimum, to reduce potential impacts to cultural resources, activities that involve mechanized surface disturbance of less than 10 cm depth will generally have transect spacing of 100 meters. More intense inventory will be used for highly sensitive areas. If surface disturbance is greater than 10 cm, then 30 meter transect intervals will be used.

All cultural resources discovered or relocated will be plotted on maps and at a minimum will be recorded on the Nevada IMACS short form. Resources except those previously determined not eligible, by BLM and SHPO, or that have been fully mitigated, will be flagged for avoidance and avoided during rehabilitation activities. Flagging will be placed to minimize the potential for looting and vandalism and removed as soon as possible.

C. Invasive, Nonnative Species:

Fire suppression efforts, including dozer line construction and use of engines and other mechanized vehicles, is likely to have introduced cheatgrass and noxious weed species seeds into the burned area. In order to reduce the potential impacts of an invasion of noxious weeds, monitoring must be conducted after rehabilitation treatments are completed. If noxious weeds are discovered to have invaded the burn area, herbicide treatments would need to be implemented to reduce the spread of the noxious weeds. Monitoring and noxious weed treatment would help to prevent or reduce any such noxious weed impacts in the Basin Fire area.

D. Native American Religious Concerns:

Native Americans will be consulted as appropriate prior to any ground disturbing activities such as discing and drilling. If traditional cultural properties or other areas having traditional or religious significance to Native Americans are discovered as a result of this consultation, then BLM will insure that measures are taken to avoid or reduce impacts to these areas of concern to Native Americans.

E. Threatened, Endangered, Candidate, or Sensitive Species:

No threatened or endangered plant species are known to occur in the burn area. The sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) has been designated by the BLM Nevada State Director as a sensitive species and therefore afforded the same protection as a candidate species. Although the suspected causes of sage grouse decline are numerous, loss of habitat, including loss by fire, ranks at the top of the list. Rehabilitation of sage grouse habitat, and the prevention of invasion by fire prone annual weeds such as cheatgrass, is a wildlife priority of both BLM and the Nevada Department of Wildlife. The proposed seeding treatments and rest from grazing pressure are designed to restore sagebrush habitat and/or reduce the impacts from the invasion or re-invasion of fire prone annual weeds.

F. Visual Resources:

The burned area is within Visual Resource Management Class 3 and changes in this class should be subordinate to the existing landscape. Both the fire itself and fire suppression activities such as creation of dozer lines, have resulted in visual impacts to the area. Revegetation efforts are designed to blend into the background without attracting undue attention and aid in restoring the area to a more characteristic landscape. Recontouring and seeding of dozer lines would reduce adverse visual impacts as well.

G. Wildlife:

Wildlife was adversely impacted by the Railroad Pass Fire primarily through temporary loss of habitat through removal of vegetation by the fire. The proposed rehabilitation treatments include resting the area from livestock grazing, and seeding several areas with seed mixtures conducive to wildlife use. In particular, the proposed seeding is specifically designed to benefit sage grouse and mule deer. In addition, aerial seeding of lower elevation areas will help establish shrub species that would out compete exotic invading plant species, as well as provide critical forage and cover.

H. Grazing:

The proposed closures to grazing within the burned area would protect seeding efforts and aid in natural revegetation of burned public rangeland, while reducing the potential for future noxious weed and cheatgrass infestations. Grazing closures will also improve future forage conditions for both livestock and wildlife. However, grazing closure and relocation of livestock will have some short term adverse impacts on ranchers in the area who normally use the allotment for grazing. The actual AUM losses suffered by ranchers have not been determined at this point. Through field inventories and monitoring, GIS analyses, and consultation, cooperation, and coordination with individual permittees, specific rest periods and other grazing management options will be identified to reduce impacts to ranchers where possible.

Project Cost Summary: (the cost summary information can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 13 Fire Complex)

Project Maps: (project maps can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 13 Fire Complex)

Cost/Risk Assessment: (the cost/risk assessment can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 13 Fire Complex)

Native/Nonnative Worksheet: (the native/nonnative worksheet can be found in the Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) Plan and Accomplishment Report for the Elko 13 Fire Complex)